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Kennedy Plaza - a vibrant public square in downtown

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Earlier this month, I was joined by representatives of the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), the Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy, city, state and federal officials, and other community stakeholders to break ground on the renovation of Kennedy Plaza, in our downtown. Shovels in hand, we broke the ceremonial ground on site and marked its transformation into a vibrant public square that will take place over the next several months.

The reinvention of Kennedy Plaza is designed to improve the pedestrian and bus passenger experience, boost safety in the area and transform the plaza into a lively destination for residents, commuters and visitors to the capital city. It has been a top priority of my 20-point economic development action plan, Putting Providence Back to Work, and part of Phase III of the Downtown Circulator Project, a multi-year project aimed at making a more vibrant downtown for passengers and pedestrians.

Kennedy Plaza is the heart of transportation in our city and state, and its success is essential to the economic vitality of our capital city. I am thrilled to begin work on this project and make the plaza a safer, more navigable civic destination for pedestrians, bicyclists, passengers and motorists. Just over 50 years ago, President John F. Kennedy -for whom this area is named - spoke from here on the eve of his historic election as America's 35th President. In the years that have passed, other notables and lesser-known individuals have used this site as the public square it was destined to be.

Its redesign comes as part of a multi-year collaboration between the Providence Department of Planning + Development, RIPTA, Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy, the Providence Foundation, the Kennedy Plaza Working Group, and other community stakeholders. The end result will support a balanced transportation system for pedestrians, bicyclists, passengers and motorists. When complete in late fall of this year, look for more open space, new plantings and decorative lighting; and with our partnership with the Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy, expect to see new and exciting programming there.

The redesign includes new berths for buses and covered wait stations for passengers. Some bus berths will be consolidated and several will be relocated to the perimeter of Greater Kennedy Plaza. As part of the overall Downtown Circulator Project that began in summer 2013, expect to see new two-way traffic along Dorrance St., between Washington and Sabin Sts., and Exchange Terrace, from Dorrance St. to Exchange St. Empire St. between Broad and Fountain Sts. and a segment of Greene St. will also be changed to accommodate two-way traffic. New bike lanes and signage downtown will better accommodate bicyclists. Sidewalks will be widened and crosswalks shortened in Kennedy Plaza and LaSalle Square to make downtown safer for pedestrians.

Angel Taveras is the mayor of Providence.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540